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## THE JAPANESE BIBLE

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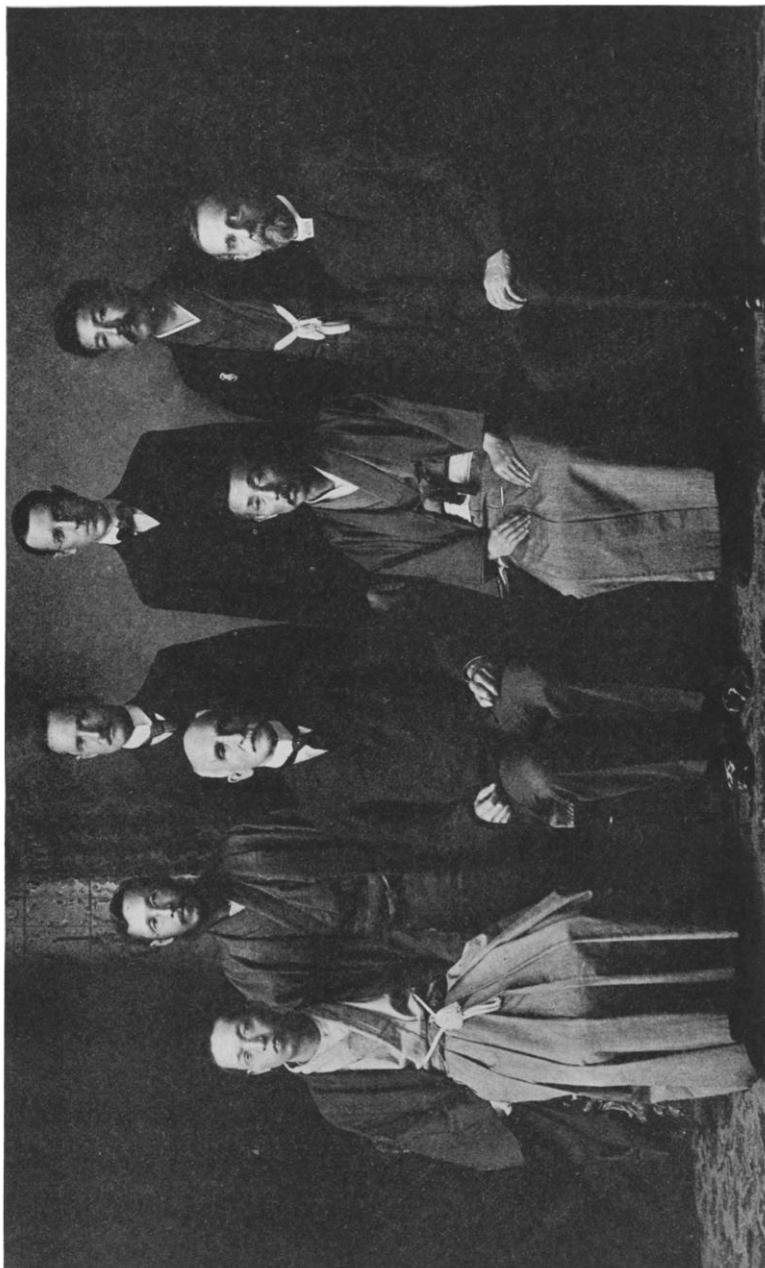
It is only 41 years since Rev. Jonathan Goble, of the American Baptist Free Missionary Society, put out his crude work, *The Gospel by Matthew*, the first portion of Scripture translated in Japan proper into the Japanese language.<sup>1</sup> It is only 40 years since the first Missionary Conference (in Yokohama) in 1872 appointed a Translation Committee, which began its work the following year. It is only 33 years since the first version of the Japanese New Testament was issued by Rev. Nathan Brown, D.D., of the American Baptist Missionary Union. It is only 32 years since what may be called, for convenience, the "Authorized Version" of the Japanese New Testament was published; and it is only 24 years since the "Authorized Version" of the Japanese Old Testament was published and thus made a complete Japanese Bible.

This looks as follows in tabular form:

- 1871. Goble's *Matthew*.
- 1872. Appointment of Translation Committee.
- 1873. Translation Committee began work.
- 1879. New Testament issued (Brown's).
- 1880. New Testament issued (Committee's).
- 1888. Old Testament issued (Committee's).

While, strictly speaking, we might be prevented by the limits of our subject from treating anything but the Japanese Bible, we cannot refrain from taking the liberty of writing at least a few words about the Chinese Bible and Chinese Christian literature in Japan. And, as the Chinese written language and literature formed a most important part of the learning of the Japanese educated classes, this phase is not so foreign to our topic. Before the missionaries became familiar with the Japanese language, and before they had any, or many, Christian books in Japan, they used

<sup>1</sup> Earlier translations of New Testament portions by Gutzlaff, Bettelheim, and S. Mills Williams had been made outside, and did not circulate in Japan.



M. Kawazoe  
H. J. Foss

M. Kawazoe  
H. J. Foss

D. C. Greene  
C. K. Harrington

T. Matsuyama

T. Fujii  
U. Bessho

REVISION COMMITTEE OF THE JAPANESE BIBLE

extensively Chinese Christian literature. Such books as Martin's *Evidence of Christianity*, Williamson's *Origin of All Things* and *Lectures on St. Mark* were in great demand. When Wakasa no Kami learned that the book which he had picked up in Nagasaki Harbor was a Testament in Dutch (which he could not read), he sent over to China for one in Chinese (which he could read). "The faithful authors of this [Chinese Christian] literature were little aware that, while working for the salvation of China, they had been, as it were, writing with a double pointed pen and working for Japan as well. They had unwittingly been doing a work which . . . was to be twice blessed."

Later, when English was made an essential element of the curriculum of Japanese education and became the most popular and necessary occidental language in Japan, it played a similar part in the Christianization of Japan. As English literature is so thoroughly permeated with Christian ideas and ideals and biblical phraseology, it has been a very important factor in Christianizing Japanese thought, language, and literature. But we pass that by for the present.

As stated above, it was in 1888 that the complete Bible was published in Japanese, so that its present age is only 24 years, comprising 12 years each in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. And it should be borne in mind that even the New Testament in Japanese has been in circulation only 32 or 33 years, less than one-third of a century. During that brief period, its influence has been felt in many ways and phases. Of course, as the pioneer translation work was done under many difficulties, it was not entirely perfect. It was inevitable, therefore, that, with the advance made in biblical scholarship in the West, and with the tremendous development of the Japanese language, a revision should become necessary even rather early.

The first steps toward such a revision were taken at a meeting in Tokyo in 1906, of what is called "The Permanent Committee on the Translation, Revision, Publication, and Preservation of the Text of the Holy Scriptures [in Japanese]." This committee is made up of the agents of the Bible Societies (American Bible Society, British and Foreign Bible Society, and National Bible

Society of Scotland) and of one representative from each mission which co-operates; and it holds a sort of "informal copyright" of the Japanese Bible. At the meeting mentioned above, it was decided that a Revision Committee should be organized as the joint representative of the Permanent Committee and the Japanese Evangelical Alliance. But, as the latter body was soon dissolved to make way for a Federation of Churches (which has only just been organized), it became necessary for the Permanent Committee alone to organize a Revision Committee. It took its first action along this line on January 11, 1910, and, after some delays, succeeded in constituting the following committee (named in alphabetical order):

Professor U. Bessho (Methodist).  
Rev. C. S. Davison (Methodist).  
Rt.-Rev. H. J. Foss, D.D. (Episcopal).  
Professor T. Fujii (Congregational).  
Rev. D. C. Greene, D.D. (Congregational).  
Rev. C. K. Harrington, D.D. (Baptist).  
Rev. M. Kawazoe (Presbyterian).  
Professor T. Matsuyama (Episcopal).

The following are the rules for the Committee:

1. The Committee shall appoint a chairman, two secretaries [one Japanese and one foreigner], and a treasurer.<sup>2</sup>
2. [The usual duties of those officers.]
3. In the revision of the current Japanese version of the Scriptures, the Committee shall be governed by the text of Dr. Nestle, as published by the British and Foreign Bible Society, it being understood, however, that in specific passages the text underlying the Revised Version of the English New Testament may be substituted, provided two-thirds of the Greek-reading members of the Committee so decide.
4. The Committee shall be further governed by the exegesis underlying the Revised Version of the English New Testament; unless by a two-thirds vote, in the light of more recent scholarship, the Committee shall adopt a different interpretation.
5. Two members of each of the divisions of the Committee, that is, two Japanese and two foreign members, shall be necessary for a quorum.
6. All decisions, excepting in the cases specified in Rules 3, 4, and 7, shall be by majority vote, it being understood that, should the Committee be

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Greene is chairman, Messrs. Bessho and Harrington are secretaries, and Mr. Davison is treasurer.

equally divided for and against a proposed change in the current Japanese version, the decision shall be in favor of that version.

7. These rules may be amended at any regular meeting by a two-thirds vote, subject to the approval of the Permanent Committee, provided not less than two weeks' notice of the proposed amendment has been given to the members of this Revising Committee.

A few words about the personnel of this committee, at least about some of the members thereof, may not be without interest. Dr. Greene<sup>3</sup> and Professor Matsuyama represent the old committee, of whom only one other member (former Bishop Fyson) is surviving, but was not eligible, because he is absent from Japan. However, Bishop Foss also belongs to the ranks of the early missionaries. On the other hand, Mr. Davison, son of Rev. J. C. Davison, D.D. (one of the first Methodist Episcopal missionaries to Japan), represents the second generation and the young missionaries. Dr. Harrington is a brother of Rev. F. G. Harrington, Litt.D., who revised Dr. Nathan Brown's New Testament: they are a scholarly pair, who studied under that great biblical scholar, the late Dr. W. R. Harper, in the Baptist Theological Seminary, then at Morgan Park, Illinois, now the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. The Japanese members are also scholarly men, well fitted for their work on the committee. Concerning Professor Matsuyama's work with the old committee, Dr. Hepburn said: "Whatever virtue there is in our Japanese text is mainly, if not altogether, owing to his scholarly ability, the perfect knowledge he has of his own language, his conscientious care." Professor Bessho also has a reputation as a literary man.

Inasmuch as two members of the committee (Bishop Foss and Professor Matsuyama) reside outside of Tokyo, it is not feasible for the whole committee to meet daily. In fact, it has been deemed better to divide the committee into pairs (one Japanese and one foreigner), who work together on different portions of the New Testament. Then the entire committee meets at stated times for long sessions to consider the work of each subcommittee. It is believed that in this way more work can be accomplished in a shorter time. A tentative edition of Mark has already been

<sup>3</sup> Senior missionary of the American Board.

printed for private circulation only, with the purpose of eliciting criticism which may be helpful in the remainder of the work. It is hoped that the Revised New Testament may be published in 1914 or 1915.

The Committee in its work has the benefit, first, of the English and American Revisions and Modern Versions of the English New Testament, and the latest French and German versions; second, of several recent Chinese versions; and third, of the late Archbishop Nicolai's translation for the use of the Russo-Greek church in Japan, of the Roman Catholic version of Pere Raquét in Japan, and of Dr. Harrington's revision of Dr. Nathan Brown's work.

Though it is premature to express any opinion concerning the contemplated revision, it may be worth while to quote from the tentative edition of Mark what the Committee itself presented as certain features of the revision. The statement reads as follows:

Perhaps the chief characteristics of this new revision are:

1. The increased use of honorifics and the elimination of many pronouns. These two points belong together, for often the honorific takes the place of the pronoun in the original. In many cases, as in the Greek, the pronouns necessary in an English version are out of place in a Japanese sentence.

2. The prominence given to the historical present. This is believed to add to the vividness of the narrative while consonant with the genius of the Japanese language.

The fact that the new version will largely be used in the public service of the Church has influenced the vocabulary and the general style.

Of course, a broad and generous interpretation of our topic would entitle us to say at least a few words concerning the tracts, pamphlets, books, cards, papers, and magazines that have been rendered necessary by the publication of the Japanese Bible. At first, this Christian literature was almost entirely translations, of varying merit, by foreign missionaries. But, in the course of years, the Christian Japanese became capable, not only of making their own translations, but also of putting forth original work. Therefore, it has come to pass that the Christian world in Japan has not merely Bible Societies, but also a Japan Book and Tract Society, a Methodist Publishing House (named Kyobunkwan in Japanese), a Keiseisha, a Fukosha, a Fukuinsha, and other publishing houses, all of which find a good market for a voluminous

Christian literature. The publications demanded by the growing Sunday-school work are rapidly increasing; and the Scripture Union publications have a wide circulation. Moreover, Christian quarterlies, monthlies, weeklies, etc., are so numerous that a mere list thereof would take up a great deal of space.

In this connection, it may be well to recall to mind that in 1859 there was not a Japanese Bible, or even a portion of the Bible, publicly circulating in Japan: but the number of Bibles, portions, tracts, and books which have been circulated among the Japanese during half a century requires to represent it seven or more digits. Moreover, until not many years ago, it was very difficult to induce a non-Christian bookseller to keep the Bible on hand; for its presence in his store might prejudice him in the eyes of the public, and, besides, it was not easily salable. But such prejudice has died away, and such a demand for the Bible has sprung up as to make it a profitable article to keep in stock.

Still another outgrowth or accompaniment of the Japanese Bible, that is, Christian hymnology, demands special attention. The earliest missionaries thought and said, "The Japanese have no music in them"; but they had more faith than they had thought and began to teach hymns and organ-playing. And the general result has been that the Japanese are found capable of being "moved with concord of sweet sounds." The organ, piano, violin, etc., have come into quite general use and are even manufactured in Japan by Japanese. Individuals, quartettes, bands, and orchestras furnish music, instrumental and vocal, for private and public entertainments; and concerts in western style have become very popular. And all this is largely the result of attempts to praise God in the Japanese language.

The first attempts at hymnology were very crude and even ridiculous. Goble, who seems never to have hesitated to step in where angels fear to tread, translated "There is a land far, far away" into the colloquial with the most amusing results. There were also some rather ludicrous versions of "Jesus Loves Me," which has always been a favorite in Japan.

It is scarcely necessary to follow out in detail the evolution of Christian hymnology in Japan. It should, however, be noted that



COMMITTEE THAT PREPARED THE "UNION HYMNAL" FOR USE AMONG JAPANESE CHRISTIANS

the earliest attempts by missionaries to teach singing were through the medium of English hymns, and that it was not until 1873 or 1874 that the first Japanese hymnal was issued. For thirty years, the only hymn-books were the various denominational ones, which gradually grew larger and more numerous and better. In 1903, the first *Union Hymnal* was issued and was far and away the "best seller" of that year in all Japan. The first large edition was exhausted very soon after it was issued; and the seventh edition is now on sale. There is also a *Union Sunday-School Hymnal*, which is selling well. The hymns in the *Union Hymnal* are, with only two or three exceptions, occidental tunes;<sup>4</sup> the exceptions are harmonized Japanese tunes, like "Imayo" or "Moso." Christian hymns may be heard all over the Empire; and Christian tunes are freely used for secular music. It rather shocks the feelings of the most sensitive Christians to see and hear a grotesquely attired group of advertisers marching through the streets to the tune of "Onward, Christian Soldiers"!

The Japanese Bible has been the comfort and the consolation of many an individual. When, in the early days, some Christians, like Mr. Hara and the late Speaker Kataoka, suffered imprisonment for liberal political opinions, they found the Bible a companion of cheer and filled their minds and hearts with its encouraging exhortations. Indeed, it was the teachings of the Bible that required a new word for "individual" and also introduced into the Japanese language the English word "personal" as *perusonaru*.

The Bible has been, and is, dear to other statesmen, like Hon. Sho Nemoto, M.P., the great temperance champion, who is himself superintendent of the Bible School of a Methodist church in Tokyo. Judge Watanabe, the chief justice of the Supreme Court of Chosen (Korea), is a man who has gained the confidence of all, Japanese and Koreans, because he lives according to the precepts of the Bible.

The Japanese Holy Scriptures have been, and are, the inspiration of the life of many a Japanese business man, like the late Mr. Kobayashi, the "Lion Dentifrice" man, who exerted a strong influence for good in the mercantile world.

It is likewise the Bible which has inspired men like Ishii, of the

<sup>4</sup>The Tonic Sol-Fa System is very popular in Japan.

Okayama Orphan Asylum, Tomeoka, of the Reform School, or Home School, and others, to establish a philanthropic work, to help the poor, the blind, the neglected, the fatherless, the sick, the insane, the leper, the outcast, the Magdalene, and the worst criminal.

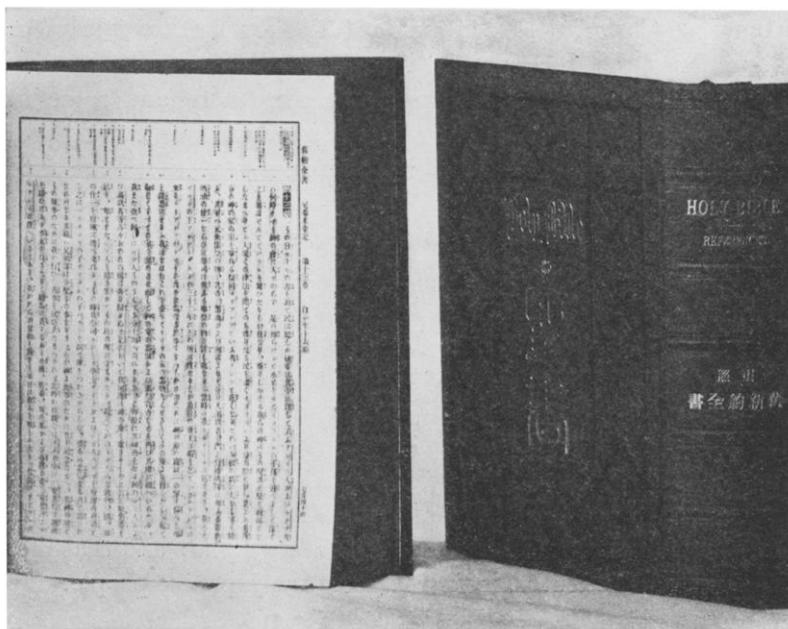
The influence of the Japanese Bible upon the lives of individual Japanese might be still further illustrated along other lines; but the limitations of space will not permit details. It may be summed up in the following statement, that the teachings of the Bible are molding the lives of persons on the farm, at the mechanic's bench, in the shop and manufactory, in the store, in the office, at the bar and on the bench, in the schoolroom, at the editorial desk, at the sick bed, in the hospital and asylum, in the army and the navy, in the local governments and assemblies, in the Imperial Diet, in the diplomatic service at home and abroad, in the Cabinet, and even in "Caesar's household."

Moreover, the influence of the Japanese Bible should not be measured only in relation to the nominally professing Christians, upon whose lives it has been a great power for good; it has also profoundly influenced the lives of thousands whose names are not enrolled upon the church record-books. For one reason or other (good, bad, or indifferent), they have not connected themselves with any Christian organization; but they are reading and studying the Bible and are trying to fashion their lives according to the precepts and examples of Jesus Christ. One leading Japanese pastor has estimated that there are in Japan today (probably including the nominal Christians) about one million persons who are modeling their lives according to the teachings of the Bible.

It is a matter of no small importance to trace, in outline at least, the influence of the Japanese Bible upon the Japanese language and literature. Of course, it is not to be expected that one can find in Japan the same formative influences, the making of the language, as in the cases of the English and the German Bibles. The work of Wyclif and of Luther was done at a formative period in the history of each language. But, in Japan, the Bible came at a comparatively late period in the development of the vernacular; and it came as a foreign, rather than a native, and an imported, rather than an indigenous, factor. And yet it has had an influence

by no means small, in re-forming, that is, in making over, the language of Japan. The influence of the Japanese Bible has been felt in a marked way in the vocabulary, the style, and the literature. And, in this connection, it is impossible to refrain from taking notice also of the influence of the English Bible upon the religious vocabulary.

The Bible has put new meanings into old words, like *kami* ("god"), which it has capitalized, and *ai* ("love"), which, from a



comparatively low and base meaning, it has lifted out of the mud and mire and has cleansed and purified. The Bible has compelled the coining of words to express new ideas and has thus enriched the language with new words for "individual," "sacrifice," "character," "superstition," "hymn," "eternal life," "duty," "responsibility," "liberty," "direct," "indirect," "absolute," etc. And, when it was difficult to translate a term of Scriptural phraseology or derivation, like "Christmas," "personal," "revival," "inspiration," etc., it has often been found advisable to transfer the English word

itself into the language. And often an English word like "Bible" or "blessing," may be used quite as freely as its Japanese equivalent. Moreover, allusions to scriptural incidents and quotations of phrases and even sentences from the Bible are not infrequent, even in the secular press. And biblical morality has been eloquently portrayed in such novels as *Ichijiku* ("The Fig Tree") and *Hototogisu* ("The Cuckoo"), called *Nami-Ko* in its English edition.

And the influence of the Bible is not lacking in the field of Japanese art, especially in furnishing subjects for treatment. For instance, a Christian student in the art school chose "Jesus of Gethsemane" as his subject in the graduating examination. Pictures of biblical subjects are appearing more and more in exhibitions; and, even in the rage for souvenir cards, scriptural scenes are illustrated and salable, particularly at the Christmas and Easter seasons.

Thus, the Japanese Bible, with all its resultant and correlated literature, with the aid first of the Chinese Bible and its literature and later of the English Bible and its literature, has made itself felt in Japan and among the Japanese everywhere for the past forty or fifty years. The moral and spiritual teachings of the Bible have taken deep root in Japan and are bringing forth the usual fruits of the Spirit. The Gospel, with its related civilization, has been, and is, a social, political, educational, moral, and spiritual dynamic in Japan. The life of Jesus Christ, the great biblical "hero," has been infused into the life of New Japan; and that life, with its vitalizing truths, is transforming the Japanese people.